

To: Downtown Design Advisory Board (DDAB)
From: Bridget Rassbach, Urban Design Architect
Meeting: 1/25/2022
RE: Staff Report for Site Design and Massing Review

SGI-USA Denver Culture Center
1450 N Speer Blvd
2021PM0000378

I. Board Authority and Role of Design Review

This project is located within the D-GT Zone District and is therefore subject to **Design Review for Downtown Urban Design Standards and Guidelines** and the **Denver Zoning Code** in addition to the requirements of other agencies. Projects submitted shall conform to all the requirements of the **Downtown Urban Design Standards and Guidelines**, even if they are not specifically referenced in the review notes.

The **Downtown Urban Design Standards and Guidelines (AS DSG or DSG)** are applicable for this location. The **Standards and Guidelines** establishes a process for promoting the neighborhood vision by setting clear expectations for the level of design quality that is envisioned for improvements for Arapahoe Square.

Through its provisions, the Design Advisory Board is directed to consider Design Review Submittals of the proposed project (per the Design Review Process chapter and checklists), to receive the staff findings, the applicant presentations, and to hear public comment to make a motion for **recommendation for Approval, Approval with Conditions, or Denial to the zoning administrator of the project's design at each submittal to the Downtown Design Advisory Board.**

II. Scope of the Project

Remove existing 3-story building and replace with new 2-story building for a Buddhist Center (with an emphasis on education). New structure is being developed under the **General Building Form**. This form requires a 70% build-to on all street facing frontages and an Entrance. Entrance is further defined as: *An operable opening to a building that provides direct public access from the Primary Street to the primary uses within the building. Section 8.1.3 further defines: BUILDING ENTRANCES Entrances to office and residential buildings tend to be directly from the public sidewalk into a lobby. Retail stores and restaurants are typically accessed from the public sidewalk*

III. Site Design and Massing Review

The applicant, SGI-USA Denver Culture Center, 1450 N Speer Blvd, project number 2021PM0000378, is submitting the project to the DDAB for Site Design and Massing Review. They have submitted and have received comments for their Concept Review for the development process; they have made two concept submittals.

IV. Design Review

Design Review submittals and reviews to be completed after Site Design and Massing Review is approved and after approval to submit for a Site Development Plan (SDP).

V. Staff Findings

- A. The proposed design meets all vehicular standards with 1 vehicular access point from Galapago Street. There are two pedestrian access points, one off Speer and one off of Galapago Street. Vehicle access is adjacent to the pedestrian access off of Galapago Street.

- 1.A To reinforce traditional urban block and lot typology that reinforces typical block and alley patterns and reflects the original zone lot rhythm
- 1.B To break up long facades into components that add interest to massing and facade wall and promote Human Scale
- 1.C To promote continuity of Street Level activity and minimize pedestrian conflicts
- 1.D To encourage vehicular access through alleys or private access drives

- B. Although Entrance does not directly face the street, Speer Blvd., the entry plaza, open to public during normal business hours, provides for active, pedestrian oriented streets and engagement between building uses and the Public Realm. Primary facade along Speer meets this requirement providing an enhanced setback and a facade and is consistent with structure to south.

- 1.E To promote active pedestrian-oriented streets
- 1.F To promote engagement between building uses and the Public Realm
- 1.G To encourage additional space for pedestrian activity and related amenities

- C. 1.20.e - Activate Open Space with pedestrian oriented design features Open Space at Entry Plaza is the primary space that supports this standard

- 1.H To support adjacent existing or planned open space networks
- 1.I To break down long building frontages
- 1.J To ensure sunlight and human comfort is maximized within Open Spaces
- 1.K To provide areas for pedestrian respite and accommodate a variety of outdoor uses
- 1.L To promote the safety and visibility of Open Space

- D. Parking area is visible from Speer and additional garden walls and landscaping would bring the project closer to meeting the 1.43 and 1.45 standard. The Open Space does not have a separation from parking.

- 1.Y To ensure that Surface Parking is well-integrated into the streetscape
- 1.Z To ensure that Surface Parking contributes positively to a sustainable urban environment
- 1.AA To minimize the visual impacts of parked cars on the Public Realm
- 1.AB To encourage Surface Parking designs that provide flexibility for temporary events
- 1.AC To ensure that Surface Parking design promotes pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular safety
- 1.AD To ensure that Surface Parking areas are not the dominant characteristic of the site

- E. The proposed building uses traditional elements that include a base (lower level) that has a different material and color from the upper level. The proposed scale of the building is similar to many adjacent buildings in the downtown area. Building massing has been satisfied with changing of materials and color from the ground level facade to the upper level facade..

- 2.A To ensure Building Massing supports a comfortable Street Level experience
- 2.B To encourage building modules that break down long undifferentiated frontages
- 2.C To use Building Massing to purposefully reinforce building uses or adjacent distinctive features
- 2.D To promote building sizes and proportions that contribute to visual permeability within and across the neighborhood
- 2.E To allow creative and innovative Building Massing
- 2.F To coordinate Building Massing across the Lower Story Facade and Upper Story Facade/Tower Façade
- 2.G To encourage buildings that respond to the surrounding context

- F. The proposed structure responds to the scale of many surrounding buildings. Although project is only 2 stories, it respects the low scale structures to north and south along Speer. Street wall height is not 60% to 80% of ROW width but structure is appropriate to the surrounding structures. Street wall height guideline will be obtained with the addition of trees in the open space to enhance a sense of enclosure.

- 2.H To promote a well-defined Streetwall that establishes a proportional street enclosure ratio
- 2.I To promote a range of Streetwall heights along the street and within each block
- 2.J To coordinate a scale relationship between the Streetwall of adjacent properties

- G. 2.25 - 2.27- proposed building is responsive to the adjacent diner in scale. Although the diner is not historic it is a character type for the existing neighborhood

- 2.K To maintain, highlight and emphasize characteristics of adjacent Historic Resource and Character Building
- 2.L To promote distinctive design that is compatible with adjacent Historic Resource or Character Building
- 2.M To provide a scale transition between taller buildings and adjacent lower-scale neighborhoods or buildings

VI. Submittal and Compliance Checklist

Refer to the attached checklist. Green-highlighted checked topics are areas that appear to comply or are not applicable to project; Orange-highlighted checked topics are issues for further design discussion; Red-highlighted checked topics (if there are any) appear to not comply and require intensive board input.

VII. Staff Recommendation

For a board motion that includes:

I move to recommend the SGI-USA Denver Culture Center, 1450 N Speer Blvd, project number 2021PM0000378, for Urban Design - Form and Massing **Approval with Conditions** to the Zoning Administrator to address the following areas of concern:

1. Provide additional and enhanced landscape strip between Galapago and the parking area
2. Provide landscape planters sized to allow for sufficient sized shrubs between entry court and parking to screen parking from Speer. Current plan shows planters that are only 2' wide which is not sufficient to maintain plants.